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HOW TO USE AN ADVISORY PERIOD TO CULTIVATE HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENTS' SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL GROWTH

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Overview

In the United States, students spend an average of 6.64 hours in school each day for 180 days of the year (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). This time is divided up in a myriad of ways depending on factors such as the age of the student, his or her abilities or special education status, and the district. Still, despite different possibilities for the format of the school schedule (traditional six, seven or eight period days or one of the many styles of block schedule), recurring themes and patterns in what high school looks like for students in the United States have emerged.

Regardless of the schedule, for decades many American high schools have allocated a portion of each day or week for an advisory period (Poliner & Lieber, 2003). Advisory goes by many names, like zero hour or homeroom, and can take many forms in terms of the frequency, duration, and goals of the program. However, the idea behind it is always essentially the same: personalize the public high school experience by connecting a smaller group of students to one teacher or adult which allows for a more meaningful, long term relationship that will support the needs and ultimate success of each student (Benson & Poliner, 2013; McCarty, 2014). Which needs are supported and what activities the advisory does to support that success varies depending on the district, the school, federal and state funding, initiatives, and standards, and strategic plans set forth by the administration.

Advisory comes with the flexibility to include and address almost anything, and so its purpose has continuously shifted since its origin. Defining a clear, relevant purpose and creating an actionable plan for a worthwhile high school advisory period is the essence of this Capstone Project. In Chapter One I will discuss my personal experience with advisory, the many forms the high school advisory period has taken at a single school where I teach over the course of the last five years, and the current needs present in my own school as well as many schools in Minnesota and the United States that can potentially be addressed and met by more effectively utilizing built-in advisory periods. The final product developed as a result of my personal experience, review of the literature, and curriculum project seeks to provide high school educators with a potential answer to the following: How can high school teachers cultivate students' social and emotional growth during an advisory period in order to promote positive behavior and increase overall student achievement?

Advisory and its many purposes

I am in my sixth year of teaching, and I have taught at a school with a 'homeroom' or 'advisory' period all six years. At my current school, advisory meets every day, for 25 minutes. I have a group 20 to 25 same-grade students each year, and after initially being randomly assigned these students, we have been semi-successful at keeping students with the same advisory teacher for multiple years in a row. These students may or may not have me as a content area teacher, but I do have access to all of their grades and contact information. Year in and year out, the 'plan' for advisory has changed, but has included some of the following: sustained silent reading time, college/career readiness curriculum through Ramp-Up or Naviance, grade checks,

advisory community building, club/activity meeting times, passes to content-area teachers for interventions, one-on-one conferences, homework help, free time. Not that any one of these initiatives or ideas has been inherently negative, but the current climate of advisory, for staff and students alike, is less than ideal. Student contact time is precious and important, and the inclusion of homerooms or advisories in schools with no clear plan can be a missed opportunity for the adults and adolescents.

Teachers at my own school and around the United States are also feeling weighed down by the all of the ‘extras’ required of them. On top of planning for, carrying out, and assessing engaging, standards-based lessons that help students achieve clear learning goals developed from state and national standards, teachers must scaffold, differentiate, and accommodate for a wide variety of students in terms of learning and behavior. We must integrate technology, communicate with students, parents, and community members in almost real-time, continue to provide meaningful feedback and assessment, get to know our students personally, co-teach with EL teachers and special education teachers, support paraprofessionals, etc. Along with the numerous, high expectations in place for our profession, we have also become accustomed to numerous frameworks, initiatives and subsequent committees intended to support our achievement of these high expectations. Many of these frameworks have become commonplace in education in the United States – for example, Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports or MTSS and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

Committees, initiatives, and frameworks – all about the students

A couple of common, research-based, and somewhat popular structures present in America’s school system include Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and Positive

Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Both of these frameworks are school-wide structures designed to address the needs of and support the success of all students, with built-in layers of additional support and response for those students who require more than the typical amount of support to reach their potential. For MTSS and PBIS to work properly, there typically needs to be top-down structure, financial investment by the district and professional development for administrators and staff, committees assigned to carry out tasks related to the framework, and staff buy-in to the system

A Multi-Tiered System of Support “relies on multiple tiers of instruction that work together as a safety net to prevent school failure” (Minnesota Department of Education, 2017). MTSS includes school-wide, high-quality, evidence-based instruction, accurately and systematically assessing students achievement of rigorous standards goals, and benchmarks, using that data to make informed decisions about instruction and additional supports for struggling students, the availability and delivery of tier-2 and supplemental interventions for struggling students, regular evaluation and measurement of the fidelity of MTSS, and a community of practice among other districts (Minnesota Department of Education, 2017).

Whereas MTSS is more about academic achievement, PBIS or Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports seeks to increase the efficiency, effectiveness, and equity in schools and other agencies by creating a multi-tiered system and approach to social, emotional, and behavioral learning and support (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2017). The design of MTSS is to increase academic achievement, and the design of PBIS is to address the social, emotional, and behavioral development necessary for grade-level academic achievement

to occur. The rigorous standards for achievement identified in MTSS are those established by the Common Core or through state academic standards. Clear, universal standards and benchmarks for PBIS are less clear, and the time and attention paid to them varies by state, district, classroom, and educator (Dusenbury, Calin, Domitrovich, & Weissberg, 2015).

Thus, the academic class periods of the school day already exist to support student academic success, but the academic class periods of the day may or may not address the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students. Schools that make PBIS (or any other non-academic initiative) a priority try to embed this framework into their 'regular' academic periods of the school day, where teachers are already tasked with supporting student achievement of numerous, mandated, academic standards. This may lead to teacher pushback or varying degrees of implementation from teacher to teacher and classroom to classroom (Schanfield, 2010). Another option is for PBIS to be explicitly taught and supported in a separate, non-academic setting such as advisory, and then ideally referenced and reinforced school-wide and across all academic settings in a more integrated way that does not require a lot of additional classroom time.

Integrating initiatives into advisory

In my own experience, a multi-tiered system of supports has always been present in the schools at which I've taught and currently teach, even if that specific language wasn't used to refer to it. Teachers designed lessons using rigorous national or state academic standards. They created or chose learning activities to try to engage as many students in as many ways as possible. They used or designed assessments to measure student achievement. If students did not demonstrate mastery or earned low grades,

teachers took steps to reach out to the student to help them learn what they didn't understand, or connected them with study groups, tutors, websites, or counselors to help address the specific, additional needs of that student. When appropriate, the student may be referred to a social worker or evaluated for special education. Now, all of those things are under the umbrella of MTSS, and schools try to better delegate the work of supporting students and refine which aspects of student support are lacking based on available data.

PBIS has been a newer initiative, and one that has shown up as schools are being held increasingly responsible for the development of the whole child (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2014). Our high school has been in various stages of trying to implement and/or sustain PBIS over the course of the last four years. We have struggled for a variety of reasons: partial staff buy-in, high teacher and administrator turnover on the committee, fundamental differences of opinion on the use of extrinsic motivators such as a ticket system, and a lack of funding for PBIS-related initiatives. Not all staff are in agreement about what teaching behavior to adolescents should look like, especially when it comes to differences in cultural norms and when to give a student a second, third, or fourth chance when the undesirable behavior is serious; this is an echo of the zero-tolerance discipline policies that gained popularity in the 1980s and 1990s and subsequently were found not to be best practice, yet still remain ingrained in many American institutions (Ward, 2014). Ideology aside, over the past two years, our school also experienced a significant increase in office discipline referrals. As a part of my school's PBIS team, we regularly reflect and try to action plan in response to this data.

There are likely many variables that contribute to this problem of the documented increase in unexpected or negative behaviors. Our school and community demographics are changing rapidly; our staff demographics have remained the same and do not reflect our student population. Our enrollment is declining, and we are in need of passing a referendum, which has increased our student to teacher/counselor/social worker/administrator ratios. Perhaps cell phones, screen time, and social media contribute to many student behaviors.

During this time period, we have been diligent about collecting behavior data and trying to improve the communication of expected behaviors to students and clarifying and supporting teacher follow-through of more predictable responses to those behaviors. We have made progress with supporting more predictable, fair, consistent teacher responses to undesirable behaviors as well as collecting and analyzing our discipline data (hence, we think, the uptick in office discipline referrals). However, we have not had a lot of success at finding and implementing programs to a) teach desired behaviors to high schoolers in a way that is age-appropriate, effective, and logistically feasible and b) re-teach desired behaviors to those students who did not learn and/or exhibit the expected behavior the first time around. I would like to explore resources for doing so and develop a plan for implementation within our school's advisory period.

I've wondered how we can do a better job of sustaining PBIS-based initiatives at my school over the past couple years since I've joined the team, because we've really struggled with getting staff on board and excited about carrying out some of the pieces. A lot of my colleagues are really burned out by always responding to behavior issues, especially language, student-to-student harassment, and bullying/sexting/other

inappropriate social media behavior. We are kind of stuck in a cycle of responding to these issues, but haven't been able to invest time or find a good way to start addressing these things before they become a problem. The middle school from which our students come has been trained in and does utilize PBIS, but we are still dealing with general education students who have a significant need for behavioral support.

Whether you call it homeroom, a flex period, or an advisory period – as I will throughout this Capstone Project – this non-academic time of day provides a lot of potential for schools, staff, and students to do really cool things. However, if left to the individual teacher or student to 'choose' the best way to use one's advisory, it does not always happen. For my school, my colleagues, and myself, revitalizing advisory while hopefully building community in the school and providing safe spaces for restorative practices when it comes to behavior could be a game-changing shift in school culture and climate. Since advisory is an opportunity to be flexible and not bound by national or state curriculum standards, there is a lot of room to address a number of similar problems using advisory as the mechanism. In my experience, our school has tried to do too many of these things all at once with all students through advisory, and so its purpose has become unguided and confusing for both staff and students. College and career exploration, activity/club meetings, student news, mentor/mentee relationships, sustained silent reading time, team-building activities, fostering the development of soft skills – there is a lot of potential, but there is also potential to just start throwing a bunch of different 'things' at students that we think they need in hopes that some of it sticks, without really considering what they view as a need or what research suggests is the best way for a 14 to 18-year-old to spend their 'free time.'

By investigating ways in which teachers can cultivate students' social and emotional growth during an advisory period in order to promote positive behavior in and out of the classroom as well as a greater sense of school-wide community, I seek to create a research-based advisory curriculum that lays the groundwork for positive youth development by addressing the more urgent, social and emotional needs of adolescents first to empower them in their own self-actualization and independent achievement of broader, loftier, longer-term goals (Maslow, 1943). This curriculum project will be of use to any and all districts, junior and high school administrators, and teachers seeking to embed or integrate school-wide initiatives such as MTSS and PBIS more concretely and meaningfully into the day-to-day experiences of their students.

Summary

This Capstone Project explores how the concept of a high school advisory period is an evolving yet enduring presence in many American high schools; I want to clearly identify the common themes among successful advisory programs for high school aged students and teachers. Based on these themes, I plan to develop a clear structure, an introductory unit of advisory curriculum, and a guide for implementation based on the best practices identified in the research; the end product will be piloted at the mid-size, exurban high school where I teach. This work is important because it is not clear what structures for advisory seem to meet this generation's students' needs best? What are the relative pros and cons of different popular advisory formats? What non-negotiable pieces need to be in place to make a high school advisory period worthwhile? My effort is not new to education, but it is one that seems to be in constant flux and a continuous topic of interest because of its potential. I hope to contribute to a more current, updated

understanding of what does and does not work. The goal of the end product is a ready-to-use, well-researched, thoroughly designed introductory advisory experience that is relevant to high school students in 2018 and beyond.

In Chapter Two I will explore the history of the advisory period and how its evolution has mirrored the evolution of other aspects of the public education and high schools. I will describe the variety of needs presented by the adolescent learner in the United States, and how the perceived relative importance of these needs has changed over time in the mind of the institution, the administrator, the teacher, the parent, and the student. I will describe current, research-based school-wide frameworks that exist to support the ‘whole-student’ approach to success, and examples of how advisory periods have been used to support such frameworks. Finally, I will summarize what foundational pieces need to be in place in terms of school structure and staff preparedness to allow for a successful advisory implementation, and what ways advisory success can potentially be measured.

Following the review of the literature in Chapter Two, Chapter Three will include an overview and description of the capstone project I developed in response to my research question: How can high school teachers cultivate students’ social and emotional growth during an advisory period in order to promote positive behavior and increase overall student achievement? The project description includes the design framework chose, standards and outcomes, assessments, setting, participants, and project timeline. Chapter Four contains my personal reflection following the development of the project: discoveries, surprises, limitations, and implications. The project itself, an introductory unit for teaching foundational social and emotional language, awareness, and skills to

high school aged students to help promote positive behavior and school-wide community, follows Chapters One through Four.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

Not every middle, junior, and high school in the United States builds a homeroom period into its schedule (Tocci, Hochman, & Allen, 2005). Those that do, however, presumably have a compelling purpose for taking precious minutes away from core classes and academic instruction and instead, allocating that time to the concept of an advisory. In this chapter, I create a bridge between my personal connection to my research question (as described in the previous chapter) and the relevant literature in education that supports the development of my capstone project as a response to that research question. To start, I summarize old and new research related to the diverse needs of the learner. Basic physiological needs and safety, psychological needs that include love, belongingness and accomplishment, and the highest needs that allow for self-actualization - some of these needs supersede learning, and other needs simply compete with the mastery of content in core subject areas (Maslow, 1943).

Following a discussion of learner needs, Chapter Two acknowledges and explores common arguments against or potential roadblocks to incorporating a homeroom or advisory period. Then, I survey the historical and present-day research that explains the potential benefits an advisory period can have for all students, and specifically high school students. Current, common school frameworks for instruction and student support will be discussed in terms of how those frameworks may be related to or bolstered by the inclusion of an advisory. These frameworks include Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports. Finally, I describe qualities and

characteristics of a “good” advisory that supports existing school initiatives as well as non-academic, social and emotional learning; this provides a segue into examples in research of how social and emotional learning can be included in an advisory format and assessed for efficacy.

By examining the traditional school schedule, the popularity of advisory periods, worthwhile whole-school frameworks to support student success, and increasing concern with the social and emotional development of today’s youth, Chapter Two will take us closer to answering the research question: How can high school teachers cultivate students’ social and emotional growth during an advisory period in order to promote positive behavior and increase overall student achievement? A description of the capstone project itself can be found in Chapter Three following this literature review, and a personal reflective narrative providing concluding thoughts on the capstone project research and development process is in Chapter Four.

The many needs of the learner

Social and emotional learning is just one aspect of a child’s development albeit a critical one; this section addresses how and where social and emotional growth can and should take place in the context of overall positive youth development (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017; Yeager, 2017). America’s shifting cultural landscape has changed the responsibility of what either parents and families or schools and teachers are expected to teach children (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2014). Since the birth of public education in the United States, and up until the late 20th century, it was generally assumed that the instruction of key social skills and ways in which to express, regulate, and respond to emotions would and should occur at home

(Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Yeager, 2017). However, over the past few decades, the cost of living and inflation has outpaced the growth of wages and household income, parents and guardians are working more, which means children are spending more time either elsewhere or at home unsupervised. Likewise, there been a shift in what students need to learn at school to be successful not only academically, but also generally.

These “keys to success” are referred to by a variety of somewhat interchangeable names such as soft skills, star qualities, life skills, professional competencies, people skills, or emotional intelligence. Regardless of the name, the desired skills implied are the same. “Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Social and emotional skills are critical to being a good student and citizen” (Dusenbury et al., 2014, p. 2). As essential as SEL is, the development process is not innate nor guaranteed.

So, social and emotional skills are not something we can assume youth will learn on their own (Espelage, Rose, & Polanin, 2016; Wiener & Tardif, 2004). In addition to some of the changes in the cultural, economic, and domestic landscape discussed in the previous paragraph, there has also been the dramatic increase in access to technology and social media within a span of only a generation or two, shifts in how youth spend their time (unlimited access to a cell phone, screen time, social media accounts, virtual rather than physical friendships and interactions), the young people of the early 2000’s have less ‘real-world’ exposure and practice with social and emotional skills first hand; much of what they see, hear, say, and experience is mediated through technology. Thankfully,

research shows that SEL is something that can be explicitly taught to students in the school setting, and is a cornerstone of the larger concept of positive youth development or PYD (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017; Yeager, 2017). However, this goal is not one that will be met by accident or simply by nature of students attending a public educational institution; as with all other aspects of school, it takes intentional planning, implementation of the plan, and assessment.

The collaborative for academic, social, and emotional learning, or CASEL, reviewed existing social and emotional instructional programs and practices, and identified four recurring themes that were found to promote SEL across all grade levels. They are free-standing lessons, general teaching and classroom management practices, integration of skill instruction and practices that support SEL within the context of an academic curriculum, and guidance to administrators and school leaders on how to facilitate school-wide SEL initiatives (Dusenbury et al., 2015). Furthermore, these themes have also been cross-examined in terms of their ability to promote equitable practices in teaching, learning, achievement, and discipline for students of different races and cultural backgrounds, sexes and genders, and groupings based on ability (Gregory & Fergus, 2017).

Ideally, a person will proceed through relatively predictable stages of cognitive development as they get older; this would include expected acquisition and eventual mastery of particular social and emotional skills at each stage, too. In the field of child psychology and development, benchmarks exist for social and emotional development for preschool, elementary, and middle and high school ages (Dusenbury et al., 2014), although knowledge of and a system for measuring the attainment of these benchmarks

are not ubiquitous in education, especially for older grades. This is likely due to complexity and variability. A wide range of factors may affect whether or not a student has reached said benchmarks in SEL at any given age or grade. Educational institutions can use these benchmarks as learning goals around which to plan instructional experiences to support student achievement of these goals. Explicit instruction of SEL could then occur using a whole school or whole class approach (Dusenbury et al., 2015), or it could be part of an intervention system for particular groups of students identified on an as-needed basis in response to data collection and analysis (Taylor et al., 2017).

Students likely could have benefitted from interventions aimed at social and emotional needs or P-12 standards for SEL standards and learning goals all throughout 20th and 21st-century public education. Race, gender, and ability level all have been linked to gaps in social and emotional development (Averill & Rinaldi, 2013; Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Wiener & Tardif, 2004). These skills, or lack thereof, are among the variables contributing to disproportionality in discipline, referral to special education, lower standardized test scores, lower rates of graduation, and other negative outcomes seen in vulnerable populations. Although this research and capstone project examines the intersection between social and emotional learning and its effect on special education populations, it also recognizes that this does not exclude the effect of other demographic identifiers such as the ones listed above. Eide (2017) explored the relationship between those student populations who are often the focus of the achievement or opportunity gap and youth lacking age-appropriate social and emotional skills. Although non-academic skills are not always measured with fidelity to analyze alongside the high-stakes testing

data that illustrates our nation's achievement gap, this research logically concluded that the two overlap (Eide, 2017).

Special education students may have been referred due to delays in social and emotional development, or they may be delayed in social and emotional development as a result of their special education status (Wiener & Tardif, 2004). A diagnosis of emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) would be an example of the former, and being pulled-out from mainstream classes or excluded from interactions with same-age peers (either intentionally or as a secondary consequence) would be an example of the latter. Regardless, students in special education still need to be given the opportunity to and accommodations necessary to achieve the same goals - academic, social, emotional, personal – as general education students. Simply because a student does not have a diagnosed disability related to social or emotional behavior, though, does not automatically mean that they possess and use these skills at a developmentally appropriate level across all contexts. Ability levels aside, given that social and emotional development is as important as the existing literature suggests, national or state standards for SEL may need to be mandated the same way in which academic standards are. There needs to also be a way for all students to learn, practice, and experience the positive feedback and outcomes associated with SEL. In the United States, the best vehicle available to try to ensure *all* students receive something is public education.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, or CASEL, summarized what a set of SEL goals for high school might look like as follows: “forming closer relationships with peers of both genders, manage increasingly complex academic content and tasks, with increasing independence from adults, effectively manage

transitions to middle and high school, increase independence from adults, begin preparing for adult roles (e.g., become more nurturing to younger children, begin preparing and practicing for work roles), develop an ethical value system that allows for responsible decision-making and responsible behavior toward self and others” (Dusenbury et al, 2015, p. 3). Since many research-based sets of standards or benchmarks for social and emotional learning already exist, it is possible to teach to these needs of the learner as you would teach any other academic subject (Dusenbury et al, 2015). CASEL provides one comprehensive example, but many states have established their own independent standards as well. California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Tennessee all have some version of K-12 SEL standards, although the quality and level of detail present varies. The following subsections explore the more logistical aspects of the research question: How can high school teachers cultivate students’ social and emotional growth during an advisory period in order to promote positive behavior and increase overall student achievement?

The barriers to an advisory period

There are many arguable and tangible benefits to what has come to be called the advisory period. Still, it is not a required part of the instructional day nor is as common as other non-mandated yet pervasive features of a high school (McClure, Yonezawa, & Jones 2010; Poliner & Lieber 2004). In the absence of a set of standards that have to be met by an advisory like those that guide content-area class periods, as well as a lack of any other clear-cut federal acts or state legislations, its inclusion and identity is totally up to the district and the school. As an ‘extra,’ it has taken a grass-roots movement by

middle schools and high schools in the United States to design, implement, evaluate, and advocate for its presence, and that is precisely what has happened over the past few decades (Benson & Poliner, 2013; MacLeod, 2016; McCarty, 2014; McClure et al., 2010; Poliner & Lieber, 2004).

Each district and school is unique, though, and depending on the current challenges experienced by a given school, the recipe for a successful advisory program may need to be tweaked. This requires administrators' and teachers' time, experience, willingness, and creativity; all these qualities are paramount to ultimately arriving at a final product that is worthwhile (Benson & Poliner, 2013; McCarty, 2014). Again, depending on existing challenges at that school, there may not be resources to spare on the endeavor. Class sizes and caseloads continue to get bigger, academic standards and curriculum continue to expand, roles such as extra-curricular advisor or coach need to be filled, and the achievement and opportunity gap must be closed. "Teachers and administrators charged with students' academic and social growth are themselves deprived of the conditions and resourced that support their own capacity to support students" (Tocci, Hochman, & Allen, 2005, p. 5). Teaching has become a complicated, multi-faceted, and somewhat overwhelming career.

If the district or school does not have a clear vision and mission for an advisory, then taking away instructional minutes from core academic classes may do more harm than good. Some of the potential benefits of advisory could be realized by a highly qualified classroom teacher. These include forming a close, caring relationship between student and adult, experiencing a sense of community with a group of peers, individualized support for academic success, and even frequent discussion and

application of social skills such as team work and problem solving (Benson & Poliner, 2013; MacLeod, 2016; McClure et al., 2010; McCluskey, 2017; Poliner & Lieber, 2004). A well-designed advisory program would seek to do these things better, though, because the nature of the relationship between teacher and student and among students would be more personal (i.e. smaller teacher-to-student and student-to-student ratio), over a longer duration (an advisory would remain a cohort beyond the length of a typical course (i.e. for all of high school rather than just a semester or a year), and would be highly specialized in terms of its focus on the aforementioned objectives (along with others) rather than competing with the course content and students' attitudes towards and prior experiences with that particular subject (Poliner & Lieber, 2004).

If the great potential of an advisory period is in its flexibility to take whatever form the school deems necessary, this is also its greatest risk. A study by Tocci et al. (2005) identified the most common goals of advisory programs that were already in place: develop interpersonal relationships, provide academic support, enrich existing curriculum, provide post-secondary preparation, build school culture or some combination of these possibilities. Every item on this list is an example of important work, but it may not be feasible for a school to create an advisory action plan that does a coherent and meaningful job of addressing *all* of these objectives within a single school year, let alone reaching the established, measurable goals in any given area. To avoid the risk of an unclear message, student confusion as to “the point” of advisory, and frustration and/or a lack of buy-in from teachers, goals must be set, action plans created and followed with fidelity, and resources allocated to make it a success (Tocci et al., 2005; Schanfield, 2010).

Finally, the dimensions and logistics of including a homeroom in the high school schedule could present difficulties. Scheduling, scope and content, roles for staff, participants and groupings, and support systems need to be in place, clearly described, with necessary training provided and on-going professional development throughout the school year (Tocci et al., 2005; Ziegler & Mulhall, 2015). Teachers cannot do an effective job serving the students as an advisor if the programming is not treated with the same (or initially, perhaps even a greater) level of importance as the already established academic curricular day. The absence of any of those five aforementioned elements may lead to inconsistency, pushback, inequitable experiences for the students, and the ultimate failure and elimination of an advisory program.

Making the case for an advisory period

As established earlier in the subsection “The many needs of the learner,” if the consensus is that social and emotional learning is an essential part of youth development, then the next question is how and where that learning might take place. For the high school and even sometimes middle school student, the academic school day is divided up into subjects, and it may be difficult to delegate SEL standards and curriculum to any one content area or to all content areas effectively. A possible solution to this problem is utilizing a flexible time of the school day, such as an advisory period. Advisory periods have changed names and identities throughout the years, yet they continue to persist into the 21st century (McClure et al., 2010; Poliner & Lieber 2004). The underlying hope for an advisory period remains the same: students can benefit from having someplace to call ‘home’ within the academic context. Having a home base, or advisory period, can potentially serve many purposes, and the search for the purpose or purposes that provide

the greatest benefit to students seems to be a theme in the literature in recent history, as summarized in some more recent meta-analyses (Benson & Poliner, 2013; MacLeod, 2016; McCarty, 2016; McClure et al., 2010; McCluskey, 2017; Mooney, 2017; Poliner & Lieber, 2004; Tocci et al., 2005).

As schools have continued to experiment with initiatives and reforms that help them meet the needs of all learners through personalization, an advisory has been identified as a channel through which such goals as improving school environments by increasing student engagement and connectedness with the learning environment (McClure et al., p.3, 2010). Advisory periods can attempt to create a personalized learning experience in a number of ways. Meeting with a small group of peers, developing and maintaining a consistent relationship with a caring adult, activities and discussions to support cultural, social, and emotional awareness and growth, low-pressure academic and extra-curricular support, goal-setting to promote academic success, community building, post-secondary planning – this list encompasses only the tip of the advisory iceberg in terms of what could be or should be addressed during such a flexible period built into the school day (Benson & Poliner, 2013). These are all lofty and idealistic goals that are not magically achieved by simply stating that they are the purpose or intent of a school's advisory program. Poliner and Lieber (2004) developed a guide for advisory design and implementation that included nine key components: goals, content, materials, groupings, schedule, advisor's role, professional development, assessment, and links to school mission and context. A design and implementation guide such as this is a good first step, but schools still need to research further to establish the best practices in terms of the what and the how for each of those nine areas.

Students perception of personalization has been found to correlate positively with their achievement in school as measured by weighted grade point averages and standardized test scores (McClure et al., 2010, p. 10). Social and emotional skills are also incredibly personal. Examples of social/emotional goal areas established by one of the state leaders in the field, the Illinois State Board of Education's social and emotional learning standards, include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, interpersonal skills, and responsible decision making. All five of these abilities are not as objective as the typical learning standard, but more subjective particular to the personality and experiences of the individual. They may be demonstrated successfully in a variety of different ways, entirely reflective of and based on a student's background, race, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, ability level, and personality.

An opportunity exists, then, for high school teachers to create a school experience that caters to the individual student by including an explicit curriculum that addresses social and emotional learning. If personalization is the goal, advisory can be the means, and other school-wide efforts, such as a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) or Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) are also methods through which student personalization can be better supported (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2014). How can personalization also support the common school-wide goals of positive behavior and a sense of community? Initiatives aimed at engaging, educating, and encompassing the "whole child" will be examined in the following sections. These structures, chosen because they exist to and function to increase student achievement by identifying and addressing external factors that

negatively affect student well-being, all require staff education and buy-in, time, and a setting for implementation.

Advisory and other school initiatives and frameworks

“Health and education affect individuals, society, and the economy and, as such, must work together whenever possible. Schools are a perfect setting for this collaboration” (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2014, p. 2). Schools are being called on to meet a longer and longer list of goals and objectives. All children in the United States are compelled to receive an education, be it public, private, parochial, Montessori, or home school. Since all children are legally required to attend school, and the federal and state governments are tasked with establishing parameters via legislation and funding through which to guide why and how schools function (Alexander & Alexander, 2015), it makes sense (whether it is realistic or not) that our country’s vision for the future falls to our schools. The only venue through which children can be reached in a somewhat standardized, measurable way is education.

There are many factors that may influence the future of America’s children and thus the future of America itself, not all of which can be discussed here. Education and academic achievement are directly related to and products of many of these factors including physical health, mental health, and socioeconomic status. Thorough research by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (2014) and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2007) concluded that society must acknowledge the interconnectedness between an individual’s overall health and their ability to learn and achieve; if students are to succeed, schools and communities must nurture the “whole child” (p. 5). This new model, the “Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child

(WSCC) model” calls on an alignment of resources inside and outside of the school to support the individual student (p. 6). Schools are not just tasked with academic teaching and learning, rather academic progress is more likely achieved by all students when it occurs alongside health education, physical activity, nutrition, health services, counseling, psychological & social services, social and emotional climate, physical environment, family engagement, and community involvement (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2014).

This WSCC model is overarching and sets a high standard. Two aspects of Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child - psychological and social services and social and emotional climate - are directly related to my research question “How can high school teachers cultivate students’ social and emotional growth during an advisory period in order to promote positive behavior and increase overall student achievement?” WSCC serves as a broad mission and vision for schools and children in the United States, but there also exists many smaller, more focused models, initiatives, and frameworks which provide specific guidance for our educational institutions to help them reach goals related to particular pillars of WSCC, such as social and emotional growth (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2014). A discussion of two examples of these smaller, more focused models follows.

Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) are frameworks designed to address the needs and support the success of all students. They include built-in layers of additional support and response for those students who require more than the typical amount of support to reach their potential. Applicability to all students, multiple tiers of high-quality, differentiated

instruction, integrated assessment and data collection methods, and a responsive problem-solving method that allows for informed decision making at each tier are common characteristics shared by both of these models (Averill & Rinaldi, 2013). For MTSS and PBIS to work properly, there typically needs to be top-down structure, financial investment by the district and professional development for administrators and staff, committee(s) assigned to carry out tasks related to the framework, and staff buy-in to the system (Averill & Rinaldi, 2013; Minnesota Department of Education, 2017; OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2017).

MTSS and PBIS are not identical; rather, they are synergistic in design and action, with MTSS often encompassing PBIS (Averill & Rinaldi, 2013). A Multi-Tiered System of Support “relies on multiple tiers of instruction that work together as a safety net to prevent school failure” (Minnesota Department of Education, 2017). MTSS includes school-wide, high-quality, evidence-based instruction, accurately and systematically assessing students achievement of rigorous standards goals, and benchmarks, using that data to make informed decisions about instruction and additional supports for struggling students, the availability and delivery of tier-2 and supplemental interventions for struggling students, regular evaluation and measurement of the fidelity of MTSS, and a community of practice among other districts (Minnesota Department of Education, 2017). If implemented wholly and correctly, “MTSS integrates a systemwide continuum of supports” as called for by the previously discussed WSCC model (Averill & Rinaldi, 2013, p. 2).

Whereas MTSS is more about overall achievement, PBIS or Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports seeks “to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and equity of

schools and other agencies” by creating a multi-tiered system and approach to social, emotional, and behavioral learning and support (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2017). The design of MTSS is to increase academic achievement by creating a means to identify, assess, measure, and respond to the variety of elements that may influence it, endeavors to address one of the more challenging influential elements - the social, emotional, and behavioral development necessary for grade level academic achievement to occur. The rigorous standards for achievement identified in MTSS are those established by the Common Core or through state academic standards. Clear, universal standards and benchmarks for PBIS are less clear, and their development varies by state, district, classroom, and educator (Espelage et al., 2016; Yeager, 2017).

Both of these frameworks require professional development and implementation with fidelity to work the way they are supposed to. Since the academic class periods of the school day already exist to support student academic success, buying into MTSS might be an easier ‘sell’ to classroom teachers of core content. But, depending on the school culture and climate, which is the product of the staff and students alike, the academic class periods of the day may or may not address the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students, and yet this is a pillar that must be in place for the whole child to be supported and experience development and achievement (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2014; Averill & Rinaldi, 2013; Minnesota Department of Education, 2017; OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2017). So, some schools that make PBIS a priority try to embed this framework into their ‘regular’ academic periods of the school

day, where teachers are already tasked with supporting student achievement of numerous, mandated, academic standards. Another option is for PBIS to be explicitly taught and supported in a separate, non-academic setting such as advisory, and then more easily and quickly referenced by all teachers, reinforced school-wide and across every academic setting in a more integrated way that does not require a lot of additional classroom time (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2017). This latter option can work in tandem with the strategic utilization of a high school advisory period.

Measuring the success of an advisory program

“The framework for identifying successful advisory programs has been defined by Ziegler (1993) as those with efforts focused on higher school retention rates, a better school climate, increased staff-student contact, better student behavior, better resources for subject teachers in the person of the advisor-coordinator who knows the student well, more and better parent-teacher contact, and a better use of guidance counselors as consultants to advisors” (McCarty, p. 9, 2014). Some of these initial elements are already measured by the U.S. Department of Education and individual state Boards or Departments of Education. For example, in Minnesota, the Department of Education Issues the Minnesota Report Card for every single public school. This report card includes graduation rates, growth rates, ACCESS scores, MCA and MTAS scores, demographics, college-going and college enrollment data, student engagement and student safety measures, and staff profiles (Minnesota Department of Education, 2018).

To measure the relationship between student success, student behavior, and the social and emotional well-being of students and staff, a variety of assessment tools are

available through the PBISApps, which is a suite of data collection and analysis tools supported through the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programming (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2017). FastBridge Learning is another for-profit, private option available that may be accessed depending on the school’s budget and/or existing use of the FastBridge Learning assessment platform. Additionally, more specific feedback relative to student perception of the benefits of an advisory program may be collected using an external survey such as the Search Institute’s REACH Survey, or even an independently developed survey that asks questions specific to the particular issues and needs present in that district or school. The specific qualitative and quantitative assessment of the advisory curriculum developed based on this literature review in response to the original research question “How can high school teachers cultivate students’ social and emotional growth during an advisory period in order to promote positive behavior and increase overall student achievement?” will be discussed further in Chapter Three

Summary

An advisory period that is built into the high school schedule provides the potential for many youth development opportunities: extra academic tutoring or support, interdisciplinary projects, service learning, college and career preparation, and school community building activities are examples of a few. This capstone research focuses on appropriating advisory as a time for social and emotional learning, which is supported by two current and common institutional frameworks in education considered best practice – MTSS and PBIS. For a school to turn unstructured advisory time into a productive social

and emotional learning environment, all stakeholders in the school need to understand why it is essential to address this issue with systematic approach.

Research shows that social and emotional skill deficits are becoming increasingly apparent in older adolescents, and yet mandatory, national and state standards (with a few exceptions) that require schools to address these skills do not exist, and so depending on the teacher, SEL needs of the learners may not be met to the fullest extent. When working with populations where adverse childhood experiences are more common or whose socioeconomic status or other external factors may contribute to a lag in social and emotional skill development, the need is even more urgent. A thoughtfully designed advisory program can include explicit instruction of social and emotional skills as a remedy to this problem and an answer to the question “How can high school teachers cultivate students’ social and emotional growth during an advisory period in order to promote positive behavior and increase overall student achievement?” For this response to be put into practice successfully, the curriculum must be thoroughly designed and staff implementation of such a curriculum must be supported with the necessary professional development and a community of practice (Averill & Rinaldi, 2013; Minnesota Department of Education, 2017; OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2017).

Chapter Two has addressed the many needs of the 21st century learner, research supporting the multi-faceted value of a high school homeroom or advisory period as well as potential barriers to its implementation and efficacy, and how scheduled advisory time can be used to support a variety of other school-wide frameworks and initiatives that are considered current best practices. In Chapter Three I will describe in detail my research-

based project aimed at developing an introductory advisory curriculum that can be effectively implemented by any high school teacher. Research from Chapter Two regarding staff preparation, professional development and the assessment of effective advisory programs will serve as the foundation for my backward designed unit following the Wiggins and McTighe (2011) Understanding by Design curriculum model. The project description in the following chapter includes an overview, my research question, the aforementioned design framework, social and emotional learning standards, learner outcomes, intended setting and participants, instructional strategies, assessments, and an implementation timeline.

Finally, Chapter Four will include a final reflection and conclusion to the project. A recap of the project context, major discoveries and surprises, implications of this research and the resulting curriculum unit, and potential limitations can be found in that final chapter. Lastly, the developed capstone project, an introductory unit to teaching foundational social and emotional language, awareness, and skills to high school aged students to help promote positive behavior and school-wide community, is available separately via Hamline University's Digital Commons.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

In this chapter, I describe my development of an introductory unit of curriculum piloted at my high school during the 2018-2019 school year. The creation of this project was a response to my original research question: how can high school teachers cultivate students' social and emotional growth during an advisory period in order to promote positive behavior and increase overall student achievement? The issues at the school where I teach are not unique; the literature reviewed in Chapter Two describes how social and emotional learning needs of students are not met by the structure and design of curriculum and supports in a traditional public high school. This could be because schools are not required to be by national and/or most state standards, or because teachers feel ill-equipped and uninspired to try to meet these needs separately and intentionally on top of the already overwhelming demands of the job. It is true that a great teacher will embed social and emotional learning and opportunities to practice such skills within their content area, yet this project seeks to enable any and all high school teachers, regardless of background, strength, or style, to be able to intentionally teach and help students reach social and emotional standards; in providing a resource that empowers more teachers to do so, greater equity in experience for the students is possible.

Since the inclusion of an advisory period persists in many public high schools, including the one I teach at, and the format and specific purpose of such advisory periods are usually fluid and often at the whim of the school or even teacher, I pursued this capstone project and designed a publicly-available, well-researched, ready-to-use

introductory advisory unit to a) help teachers tackle the task of explicitly teaching necessary (and most often lacking) social and emotional skills to high school students and b) give teachers a tool for promoting social and emotional well-being, positive behavior, and community within their advisory and school. Here I include an overview of my social and emotional learning-based advisory curriculum along with my rationale for my curriculum design framework choice. I also summarize the existing national and state social and emotional learning (SEL) standards I researched to develop a set of relevant, measurable standards and learner outcomes for my introductory advisory unit. Using backward design, I describe my established quantitative and qualitative assessment evidence for evaluating the efficacy of this curriculum when delivered to high school students. I also address my intended setting, participants, and project timeline. Reading this chapter will clarify the reasoning and research behind the curriculum design process I used in creating my final capstone project.

Design framework

This is a research-based, introductory advisory unit focused on identifying, reflecting on, and developing students' social and emotional skills to promote positive classroom and school-wide community. The unit and lessons were developed based on the Understanding by Design curriculum model from Wiggins and McTighe, (2005, 2011), as well as the integrated version of the model that includes Differentiated Instruction as described by Tomlinson and McTighe (2006). "Both Understanding by Design and Differentiated Instruction are complex and multifaceted to encompass the full range of factors a teacher must address in designing and implementing quality curriculum and instruction" (Tomlinson & McTighe, p. 141, 2006).

I created my capstone project using the essential elements of the Understanding by Design (UbD) and Differentiated Instruction (DI) framework. I established desired outcomes and results for high school social and emotional learning. These include what the students should know and be able to do, essential questions to pique students' interest, encourage discussion, and encourage deep thinking, and connections to big ideas that relate the unit to the students' current experiences and future lives. Next, according to backward design, I determined what assessment evidence would be collected to determine whether students were proficient and could apply their new knowledge and skills. Within the unit, I considered how I could build in opportunities to acknowledge the differences and affective needs of the learners in order to support the inclusion and success of all of the students (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, 2011).

Continuing to follow through with the chosen framework, my unit of curriculum includes opportunities for the teacher and the students to explore, review, verbalize, and reflect on the intended learning goals. I have included a pre-assessment, formative assessments, and a summative assessment aligned with the standards-based goals and outcomes for the unit; these assessments are differentiated to meet students at their current level of knowledge and skill. Lastly, the unit allows for flexibility in terms of planning the actual instructional activities and accommodating different classroom routines. Throughout and at the end of the unit, assessment evidence can be collected in a variety of formats from each student and used to make decisions about what the student needs following this introduction (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, 2011).

Standards and outcomes

In the United States, social and emotional skill development is partially reflected in some of the Common Core State Standards and National Health Education Standards (Dusenbury et. al, 2014). Some states have gone further to address this issue, and the departments and boards of education in states such as Pennsylvania, Kansas, and Illinois (to name a few) have developed P-12 standards for social and emotional development to be used by classroom educators for planning, instruction, and assessment. The goals and objectives of this curriculum project were mainly identified based on the research of these pioneers in SEL education.

During the introductory unit, students will understand that a variety of social and emotional skills exist, and that these skills, either independently or in cooperation, contribute to academic, personal, and professional success. Students will also understand that social and emotional skills include areas such as the following: self-awareness, self-management and emotional regulation, social awareness, relationship and social skills, and responsible decision making. The essential questions posed to the students during the introductory unit will include: What is social and emotional learning? What are examples of social and emotional skills? Which social and emotional skills have you mastered? Developing? Lacking? How do your social and emotional skills impact yourself? Your peers? Your school? Your community? How can you identify, practice, and improve specific social and emotional skills?

To support the attainment of the previously identified standards, learning activities and instructional strategies were selected and/or designed to support the acquisition of the foundational knowledge and skills necessary. In the introductory unit,

the foundational knowledge includes identifying main categories of social and emotional skills: self-awareness, self-management and emotional regulation, social awareness, relationship and social skills, responsible decision making. Students are expected to describe and/or give examples of specific social and emotional skills within each category that the student has either used or witnessed. Skills include roleplaying the use of specific social and emotional skills given novel, real-life scenarios, and using key vocabulary, reflecting on how social and emotional skills are related to a variety of experiences (both positive and negative) throughout their day.

Assessments

To keep my project feasible, I developed curriculum and corresponding assessments for a single ‘unit’ (approximately two weeks or 10 days of 25 to 35 minute advisory lessons) that introduces a larger, year-long curriculum to be delivered in an advisory program or other separate setting. During this introductory unit, the goals revolve around the explicit teaching and discussion of social and emotional skills necessary for success in school and life, and how those individual skills impact the social and emotional well-being of different groups. The unit acknowledges that even a self-awareness of one’s SEL strengths and weaknesses will benefit the student and can show a measurable improvement in terms of how they feel about being at school. By learning, sharing, discussing, and reflecting on their social and emotional well-being as a part of a small advisory group, the goal is for students to establish a positive group identity. This unit, delivered during an advisory period, begins the process of developing a social safety net for all participating students, regardless of their relative social and emotional strengths and weaknesses (Ziegler & Mulhall, 2015).

Specific performance tasks as assessments include student completion of a social and emotional skills self-assessment, student identification of individual, initial social and emotional skill level scores, and peer-to-peer and well as teacher-student discussions of their results. At the end of the introductory unit, students will be able to describe, in their own words, the following key vocabulary: self-awareness, self-management, emotional regulation, social awareness, developmental relationships, social skills, and responsible decision making. Students will also be able to give both examples and non-examples from their own personal experiences for each of the key vocabulary words as well. In terms of differentiation, students are given the option of sharing their learning in multiple formats: written or typed journals, visual representations of key vocabulary and concepts (by hand in the form of posters or using electronic media), as well as small group conversations and one-on-one student-teacher interviews.

Setting, participants, and project timeline

The curriculum project developed will be piloted with 150 9th grade students in an upper Midwest, rural high school of about 600 students total. The 150 9th grade students will be randomly separated into roughly eight different advisories for an average student to teacher ratio of about 18:1. The lessons are designed for an advisory period that meets approximately 25 to 35 minutes at least every other day, with up to 20 students in an advisory. Initial training of advisory teachers is set to take place during established professional development time in August prior to the 2018-2019 school year. Initial implementation of the unit will occur between day six and day 26 at the start of the school year on any every other day basis. Data analysis, reflection, and revision will

occur during and afterwards, with an opportunity to re-implement the curriculum with another grade level at the start of the second semester of the school year.

Summary

Chapter Three summarized and previewed my capstone project – the curriculum unit. I discussed my choice to utilize the Understanding by Design and Differentiated Instructions frameworks in developing my unit plan. I delineated how the essential elements of UbD and DI will be present in my social and emotional learning unit. I defended the choice of a high school advisory period as an ideal opportunity for the delivery of this curriculum. I also described the projected timeline, setting, and participants for pilot implementation of my finished product. All of these topics in Chapter Three can be seen in the actual curriculum, located separately via Hamline University's Digital Commons. In Chapter Four, I will provide conclusion, reflection, and next steps regarding the development of my curriculum unit, as well as final thoughts regarding the entire capstone project.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter includes a personal reflection of my capstone project journey. It recaps the development of my research question and its relationship to my own personal experiences and professional practice. I summarize the relevant, recent literature in the educational field through which I grounded my eventual response to my research question. I explain the links between my personal experience, the research question, literature review, and the curriculum unit that I developed. Additionally, I discuss immediate and broad implications of my final product, limitations and potential future directions for research, and a summary of my work.

Context

Through a process of self-reflection, a review of recent and relevant literature, and following a backwards design, standards-based curriculum development process, I set out to create a unit of curriculum in response to my research question: How can high school teachers cultivate students' social and emotional growth during an advisory period in order to promote positive behavior and increase overall student achievement? Social and emotional growth, advisory periods, positive behavior, and student achievement were all topics of interest for me; I have been a high school science teacher in a mid-size, rural school district for six years. Over the course of those six years, I have been asked to be a part of numerous committees including Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS), Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS), a Student Resource Committee, Student Advisory Team, and a School Climate Committee. Thus, my answer to my

original research question sought to align the missions, visions, and goals of not only committees I had been a part of, but committees that are common fixtures in most American schools (Averill & Rinaldi, 2013).

I was also trying to come up with an “answer” in the form of a flexible curriculum that could be used during an advisory period, homeroom, flex period, or any classroom, as my research demonstrated that advisory is an evolving yet enduring presence in many American high schools (McClure et al., 2010; Poliner & Lieber 2004). At the time this project and paper are being completed, I have not collected post-implementation student behavior and achievement data in the school at which this capstone project will be implemented. However, my longer-term goals include comparing said data pre- and post-implementation of the social and emotional learning curriculum. Whereas the curriculum unit is my proposed answer to *how* high school teachers can cultivate students’ social and emotional growth during an advisory period in order to promote positive behavior and increase overall student achievement, long-term data collection and reflection will be necessary to establish whether my capstone project actually *does* those two things.

Learnings

A review of recent literature in the field affirmed what I had surmised from popular educational publications and social media accounts: an advisory period built into the high school schedule is present in many high schools across America as well as internationally, because it provides such a malleable opportunity for improving student achievement and outcomes (Benson & Poliner, 2013; McClure et al., 2010; McCluskey, 2017; Poliner & Lieber 2004). Youth development initiatives such as classroom and

school community building, college and career exploration and preparation, service learning projects, interdisciplinary or extra-curricular extensions, and extra academic support or challenges are a few examples of such opportunities (Taylor et al., 2017; Tocci et al., 2005; Yeager, 2017). As far as social and emotional learning and curriculum goes, I came across many concrete examples of actual lessons and/or units intended for elementary and middle school students, but very few lessons, let alone entire units that were publicly available, tailored to a high school or older adolescent audience (Benson & Poliner, 2013; Ziegler & Mulhall, 2015). Although the task of social and emotional learning was frequently linked to the purpose of homerooms and advisories at the middle school level, research on high school advisory use covered a broader and much more variable range of topics and possibilities (Benson & Poliner, 2013; McClure et al., 2010; McCluskey, 2017; Poliner & Lieber 2004).

It was surprising to me that despite a large body of research that shows that social and emotional skill deficits are becoming increasingly apparent in older adolescents, mandatory national and state standards that require students to address these skills do not yet uniformly exist; or if they do, they are a relatively recent addition (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2014; Dusenbury et al., 2015; Eide, 2017; Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Yeager, 2017). This may be due to a perceived difficulty in assessing whether and how a school has ‘taught’ a social and emotional learning standard or goal. If it cannot be reliably measured or assessed at a national or state level, then perhaps federal and state departments and boards of education are unsure about making it a requirement. Yet, many surveys developed by private educational data and analytics companies *have* been developed to do just that – reliably measure and assess the social

and emotional well-being of youth. So, I was surprised that in this era of standardization, accountability, and assessment, that schools have not yet been tasked by the government to address social and emotional learning in a comprehensive way or specifically in an instructional context. Existing models such as MTSS and PBIS do include supports for student social and emotional well-being, but these are elective frameworks and are highly variable (Averill & Rinaldi, 2013; OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2017).

Implications

Immediate implications of my project include providing my own colleagues at the school I currently teach at with a new, ready-to-use, research-based curriculum that explicitly addresses the topic of social and emotional learning at a level that is developmentally appropriate and engaging for high schoolers. This is in response to a few issues my school is currently experiencing, but none of them are unique to my school which allows my project to hopefully reach a wider audience. These issues include a recent increase in office discipline referrals, a similar increase in the number of students seeking out mental health resources in the form of our school counselors and social workers, stagnant or declining academic performance as measured by standardized tests (MCA and ACT testing), and an existing (and in some cases, growing) achievement gap experiences by our minority and special education students. Research demonstrates that providing students with explicit opportunities to develop their social and emotional skills and continued support of their overall social and emotional well-being can address all of these aforementioned issues: behavior, mental health, academic achievement, achievement gaps. Utilizing this curriculum with the goal of addressing underlying

factors that may be contributing to these aforementioned issues is the primary reason I pursued this project; a secondary reason was to create something that would also allow high school teachers to engage students during an advisory period in a very intentional and worthwhile way. By focusing on advisory, the responsibility of addressing these issues can be shared by all teachers, as well as with smaller groups of students compared to a typical, content-area class size.

Reflecting on broader implications, social and emotional learning standards are not comprehensively addressed by the Common Core or by most state-level educational standards. However, examples of P-12 SEL standards do exist and have been adopted by a handful of state boards and departments of education (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2014; Dusenbury et al., 2015; Eide, 2017, Yeager, 2017). I used the work of these progressive states to ground my own curriculum unit in. In terms of policy implications, I would expect that nationally, we would move towards more states adopting P-12 SEL standards rather than less, and continue to put more onus on schools and teachers for nurturing the “Whole Child” (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2014). Other trends such as increased acknowledgment of students’ mental health issues and needs, training school faculty to help create trauma-informed classrooms, recognizing shortages in student support staff such as psychologists, counselors, social workers, and paraprofessionals, and even implementing frameworks such as MTSS and PBIS all suggest that social and emotional well-being is in the spotlight (Averill & Rinaldi, 2013; OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2017). Similarly, issues such as gun violence or

the relationship between cell phones, social media, and student mental health are relatively newer issues that also intersect with social and emotional learning and skills.

Limitations

In order to keep my project feasible, I focused on developing an introductory unit of curriculum. During this introduction, students are asked to make initial connections to the five core competencies of social and emotional learning: self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. They generate a list of social and emotional skills that they can already identify, reflect on their prior knowledge and experiences related to these skills, take a baseline self-assessment to inventory their current SEL strengths and weaknesses, share personal narratives of positive and challenging examples of times they witnessed or used skills that fall within each category, and prepare an interview with the teacher where they share the results of their survey, their social and emotional strengths and weaknesses, and a SEL skill goal they have developed for the school year. At the end of the introductory unit, the teacher provides direct instruction that clarifies the associated vocabulary of the year's subsequent units (self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making), as well as lays out the goals and proposed calendar for advisory that year.

I am working with a committee to complete the units of curriculum that are intended to follow the introductory unit outlined in my capstone project. Currently, the introductory unit would need modifications in order to be used as a stand-alone unit; its efficacy would be bolstered by being appropriately followed by the more focused instruction of each of the five social and emotional core competencies. Another

limitation is potential variability in the attitude and/or experience of each teacher tasked with delivering the curriculum. My design of the introductory unit attempted to make each lesson highly student-centered and student-driven. All of the necessary learning goals, essential questions, PowerPoints and/or videos to pace the lesson, prompts, directions, accompanying handouts and materials, and rubrics are included in the unit plan. My goal was to create something that did not require separate or additional professional development in order to effectively use. However, after an initial trial implementation, I will survey staff to determine whether more teacher instruction and support would have been beneficial, and develop any relevant professional development if necessary for more consistent implementation in the future.

Summary

Chapter Four summarized the context, learnings, implications, and limitations of both my capstone research and project. The capstone project is an introductory unit of a curriculum designed as a response to my original research question: How can high school teachers cultivate students' social and emotional growth during an advisory period in order to promote positive behavior and increase overall student achievement? The end product is a ready-to-use, well-researched, thoroughly designed introductory advisory experience that is both relevant and engaging for today's students and teachers. Based on the social and emotional learning standards, goals, and core competencies identified in the unit, future research and project development can focus on creating additional lessons geared towards high schoolers that further engage, explore, explain, elaborate, and evaluate social and emotional skills. No matter what name you use to refer to them, such skills are critical to the future success of today's students. Teachers who are motivated to

create learning experiences and lesson plans through which to instruct, practice, and refine these skills need to be willing to share such resources across the profession; this is the intent of this capstone project, which is publicly available by searching for my own personal teacher website listed under my name as well as via Hamline University's Digital Commons.

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